

ITALIAN INFLUENCES ON JOHN MILTON'S
EARLY POETRY

by

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INTRODUCTION

Tracing influences of the works of one author on another is a difficult and risky undertaking. When dealing with Italian influences on John Milton's early poetry, one is immediately hampered by the fact that the poet has been dead for some three hundred years, available evidence is scarce, and investigators have only begun studies on this subject within the last hundred years. With what evidence there is, it is sometimes difficult to pin down the nature and extent of specifically Italian influences on the subject matter, stanzaic forms, meter, rhetorical style, and diction of Milton's early poems.

There is a second problem, which concerns the scope of study. Most students of Milton are aware of the fact that he was acquainted not only with Italian language and literature, but with Hebrew and French as well. Milton's reading knowledge of Greek and Latin was prodigious, and much of his early poetry was written originally in Latin. His linguistic abilities and his admiration for Greek and Latin literature indicate the heavily humanistic character of his education and his approach to literature, as does his subject matter in the early poems, which is handled from the typically humanistic point of view of man in relation to his universe. Patterson, in his notes on Milton's early poems, pointed out that one has only to open to On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, the first poem printed in the 1645 edition of Poems of Mr. John Milton, to see this point-of-view

manifested.¹

While humanism undoubtedly influenced Milton while he was studying at St. Paul's and at Cambridge, humanism as a movement may be traced back to origins in the Italian Renaissance and to such figures as the poet Petrarch. Thus, a study of Italian influences on Milton's early poetry might have as its scope the growth of humanism in the Renaissance. However, this study does not. Its discussion will be confined to the influence of certain Italian poets on Milton as those influences may be pointed out in the poems themselves, as contained in the 1645 edition. Whatever identification Milton may have felt with the spirit and literary pursuits of late Renaissance humanism will be dealt with only as it is apposite to a discussion of influences of specific poets on the subject matter, rhetorical style, diction, stanzaic forms, and meter of his early poems. Because a discussion of the external evidence indicating Italian influences seemed appropriate at the beginning of this study in order to introduce the reader to the poet and to certain aspects of his cultural milieu, the next two sections deal with these matters. The following four sections deal with the poems for which there is internal evidence of Italian influences. The poems will be discussed in the following groups: the poems in Italian, the early minor poems, the sonnets in English, and Lycidas.

¹Frank A. Patterson, ed., The Student's Milton, Notes, p. 45.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND METHODS

There are two extremes to the methods which have been applied to study of Italian influences on John Milton's poetry. One is the attempt made by some students of Milton to treat the problem like one in natural science, which is to be solved by a collection and arrangement of historical evidence so as to show causal relationships. The danger of this approach is that it frequently leads to a mechanical explanation for an artistic process. At the other extreme is the approach which denies the efficacy of scientific method in a study of this sort. Its adherents try to comprehend the particular character of a poem by analysis of its text and from that deduce the possible influences which bore upon its composition. The danger of this approach is that through an excessive reliance on intuitive analysis it may overlook the plain facts of history.

There are some twelve examples of approaches to the problem of Italian influences on Milton which distribute themselves along a continuum running from the "scientific" to the "intuitive" extremes. At the right, or "scientific" end of the continuum, we have Milton's autobiographical writings. Examples of these are the tractates Defensio Secunda and the Areopagitica, and some of the familiar letters. They reveal much about Milton's travel in Italy and his reading in Italian literature. Ideally, they would be objective evidence which might be adduced in support of any argument on influences. Yet, the Italian scholar, Piero Rebora, concluded in a study that we cannot always take what Milton says

about himself at face value, particularly in regard to his claim that he visited Galileo. Historical evidence available to Reborna indicated that such a visit would have been impossible.¹

Slightly to the left on the methodological continuum are the factual studies of Milton's life and writings, including both autobiographical and historical considerations. In his book entitled The Life of John Milton, Masson attempted to account for the important influences on Milton's writing through a massive compilation of these materials.² However, as new facts about Milton's life and the dates of the composition of his poems were discovered, and as new relationships between known facts were established, Masson's conclusions about Italian influences on Milton's life and art were weakened, particularly those having to do with the sonnets in Italian.

With an eye to the text as well as to the historical background, Hanford analyzed the classical and Renaissance influences on Lycidas.³ He ably defended the poem from critical complaints that Milton's insertion of an attack on the Church had shown a serious deficiency of understanding of pastoral convention, by tracing the history of the pastoral from Theocritus to Sannazzaro and indicating that Milton was actually following a precedent well founded in the work of earlier Italian writers.

¹Piero Reborna, "Milton a Firenze," Nuova Antologia, 88 (Ottobre, 1953), pp. 147-163.

²David Masson, The Life of John Milton, Seven Volumes.
Joseph M. French, The Life Records of John Milton, Four Volumes, is the most recent study of Milton's life.

³James H. Hanford, "The Pastoral Elegy and Milton's Lycidas," P.M.L.A., 25 (September, 1910), pp. 403-447.

Four other students of Milton have carried out their studies near the middle of the methodological continuum. John S. Smart edited an edition of Milton's sonnets in which he drew upon his extensive knowledge of Italian literature to point out that in their stanzaic construction and diction, Milton's sonnets showed the influence of late developments in Petrarchan sonnet convention as practiced in Italy.¹ The Italian critic, Federico Olivero, studied Milton's sonnets and canzone in Italian and found that they showed the influences of Dante, Petrarch, and Tasso. Certain of Milton's lines were almost identical with those Olivero found in various poems by those authors.² Tillyard wrote on Milton's style, indicating that the intricate ordering of words in sentences was a characteristic of Milton's poetry which may have been shaped by extranational influences.³ An important new work is F. T. Prince's The Italian Element in Milton's Verse. In it, he traces certain influences on Milton's stanzaic forms and rhetorical devices which he believes stem from Tasso, Bembo, and della Casa. While a good deal of historical material lies behind his study, his emphasis is on analysis of the poems.

This brings us to the intuitive side of the continuum. Professor Gretchen Finney has written an interesting essay on the possible musical influences on the form of Lycidas. While she based her thesis on a knowledge of seventeenth century Florentine musical fashions and on Milton's known love for music, her case finally depended heavily on her appreciation of certain musical

¹John S. Smart, ed., The Sonnets of John Milton.

²Federico Olivero, Saggi di Letteratura Inglese.

³E. M. W. Tillyard, The Miltonic Setting.

qualities which she found in the poetry.¹

Farther to the left are the modern critics Leavis, Brooks, and Hardy. Leavis launched a vigorous attack on Milton's style, claiming it was awkward and ineffective because the syntax was arbitrarily twisted to follow Latin models.² Brooks and Hardy edited an edition of Milton's early poems which contained some analyses of the individual pieces.³ While some of their insights into influences on the poems were enlightening, some were based on a lack of historical knowledge and were inaccurate. Brooks and Hardy as well as Leavis based their findings on analysis of the texts of the poems, with few references to historical and bibliographical considerations.

One important early critic of Milton's poems is difficult to place on the methodological continuum. He is Dr. Johnson. Johnson's historical understanding was accurate when he said that Milton was indebted to "the Italians" for much of the technique in the handling of forms and syntax in his early poems, but Johnson never liked the early poetry, for reasons he never made quite clear. He wrote:

Milton never learned the art of doing little things with grace: he overlooked the milder excellence of suavity and softness: he was a lion, that had no skill in dandling the kid.⁴

That this conclusion was unjustified the writer of this study be-

¹Gretchen Finney, "A Musical Background for *Lycidas*," The Huntington Library Quarterly, 15(1951-1952), pp. 325-351.

²F. R. Leavis, "Milton's Verse," Scrutiny, 2(September, 1933), pp. 123-136.

³Cleanth Brooks and Robert Hardy, eds., Poems of Mr. John Milton.

⁴Samuel Johnson, Works of Samuel Johnson, Volume 8, p. 84.

lieves and hopes to demonstrate in the course of discussing Italian influences on the early poems.

MILTON'S BACKGROUND IN ITALIAN POETRY

Milton's interest in the study of Italian was lively, and, on his own word, began early in his life. In his poem Ad Patrem he mentions having learned to read the language with the encouragement of his father. Later, he does not seem to have regarded it as too difficult, for in his pamphlet entitled Of Education, after outlining a program of studies of epic proportions for the young, he added, "And either now, or before this, they may have easily learned at any odd hour the Italian tongue."¹

Perhaps it was because of his father's love for Italian music, which was having a great impact on the music of England, that Milton learned to value Italian as the greatest of contemporary continental literatures. Perhaps it was due in part also, as Fletcher suggested in his study of Milton's education, to the enthusiasm of Elizabethan and Jacobean language teachers for that literature.² If Milton had begun his studies of language at a later time, he would probably have met with different tastes among his teachers. By the time of Charles I, Italian humanism as a cultural influence was giving way to the new classicism of France, and tastes for French literature were already displacing those for Italian in fashionable circles. But when Milton made

¹Frank A. Patterson, ed., The Works of John Milton, Volume 4, pp. 284-285 (cited hereafter as Columbia Milton).

²Harris Fletcher, The Intellectual Development of John Milton, p. 293.

his start, Italian was still indispensable for gaining access to the most admired of foreign literatures, and Milton apparently saw no reason later to swerve from his early admiration for it.

Between the time Milton left for Cambridge in 1625 and his trip to Italy in 1638-1639, he gives every indication of having acquired a reading knowledge of Italian poetry. In a letter written to an Italian friend in 1638, Milton claimed:

I, certainly, who have not wet merely the tips of my lips with both those tongues [Greek and Latin], but have, as much as any, to the full allowance of my years, drained their deeper draughts, can yet sometimes willingly and eagerly go for a feast to that Dante of yours, and to Petrarch, and a good few more; nor has Attic Athens herself, with her pellucid Illyssus, nor that old Rome with her bank of the Tiber, been able to hold me but that I love often to visit your Arno and these hills of Fesole.

Milton himself left no specific record of his University and post-University reading, but he made allusions to his reading in several other instances. In the poem, Ad Mansum, written during his Italian journey, Milton mentioned how Manso had been patron to Torquato Tasso, author of Gerusalemme Liberata, and Giambattista Marino, lyric poet, and indicated that he had read their works. He also indicated he had read Manso's biographies of these two poets.²

The ideal way to study Milton's reading and its influence on him would be to begin by making an inventory of his library.

¹Columbia Milton, Volume 12, p. 35. The references are to the home environments of Dante (Florence is on the Arno) and Petrarch (who lived in Fesole).

²He says: "You therefore portrayed the lineage of both, the varied phases of their lives, their characters, and the gifts bestowed by Minerva; emulous of him who, born near lofty Myrcale, eloquently told the story of Aeolian Homer's life." (Columbia Milton, Volume 1, Part One, p. 289.)

However, very little is now known of what it contained, since Milton was forced to sell much of his library before he died to support himself and his daughters, and many more of the volumes were later lost. However, one book which bears his signature still exists, and that is a copy of Rime e Prose di Giovanni Della Casa (1563) into which had also been bound copies of Dante's Amoroso Convivio (1529) and Sonnetti di Benedetto Varchi (1555).¹ Varchi was a historian and poet of decidedly minor stature.² The Dante and della Casa works, however, were of more importance.

The Convivio, or "Banquet", was a long prose work in which Dante spread before the reader a feast of the knowledge which he had acquired, but its organization was unique in that every prose section began with a canzone³ written by Dante on the subject with which the section was to deal, and the prose which followed was at once a comment on the canzone and an exploration of the implications of its allegory. The Convivio was divided into fourteen sections which dealt with such topics as the advantages of writing in Italian rather than in Latin, the character of poetry, the position of man in relation to his Universe, the nature of imperial authority, etc.⁴

Giovanni della Casa was a Florentine who became Archbishop of Benevento. He was the author of an extremely popular Renaissance

¹John S. Smart, ed., The Sonnets of John Milton, p. 33.

²Ernest H. Wilkins, A History of Italian Literature, pp. 52-54.

³A poem of several stanzas, rhymed, uniform throughout in stanza-form, and natural in the progression of its thought.

⁴Ibid., pp. 254-255.

work on manners called the Galateo, and was also a writer of sonnets.¹

Della Casa's volume, with its bound-in works of Dante and Varchi, is the only book of Italian poetry which remains from Milton's library. The date of its purchase, as marked on the flyleaf, was 1629, while Milton was at Cambridge. If this is the only work for which there is objective evidence of Milton's ownership, there are a number of other works which, by inference, Milton probably knew.

Milton kept a Commonplace Book in which he wrote selections from various authors and commented on them. Certain Italian authors figure among these. There are lines from Boiardo's Orlando Inamorato, a fifteenth-century epic of chivalry, as well as from Berni's rewritten version of the same. In addition, there are quotations from prose works, such as Dante's allegorical essay on Sloth, his essay entitled Monarchia, and from Tasso's condemnation of lawyers.² These entries in the Commonplace Book indicate that Milton's reading in Italian literature was wider than merely the works previously cited of Dante, della Casa, and Varchi. However, there are two problems connected with the entries in the Commonplace Book. One is bibliographical. None of the entries is dated, and one editor has indicated that some of the entries may have been written as late as 1675.³ The other problem is a commonsensical one. Milton may have copied down the

¹Wilkins, op. cit., p. 255.

²Columbia Milton, Volume 18, pp. 130-162.

³Ibid., Volume 18, p. 505.

entries because he could not afford to buy the works or could not locate copies for himself. It is also quite possible that Milton wrote in his Commonplace Book only selections from works which he did not think were important enough to be in his library.

Literary historians have suggested a third set of works with which Milton might have been acquainted. These include textbooks and works in translation which were current and popular during Milton's early years. The first was First Fruites, a popular textbook of Italian written by John Florio, who may also have been Milton's tutor at St. Paul's and later at Horton. It consisted of sections of language study, vocabulary, and lively dialogues on contemporary topics--plague conditions, the founding of the Royal Exchange, etc.¹ Another work was a travel book called Descrizione di Tutta l'Italia, by Leandro Alberti of Bologna. It was popular in England, and Smart has maintained that it was from this book that Milton took the description of the Reno River which turned up later in the sonnet in Italian beginning "Donna Leggiadra..."²

Of the literary works in translation, an important one was Phineas Fletcher's translation of the Piscatory Eclogues of Jacopo Sannazzaro. Sannazzaro was a Neapolitan whose familiarity with the sea led him to cast a series of eclogues around fishermen rather than conventional shepherds. While these were written in Latin, Sannazzaro also wrote sonnets and canzoni in Italian,

¹Fletcher, op. cit., p. 293.

²Smart, op. cit., pp. 137-140.

and a romance in both prose and poetry, Arcadia--also in Italian.¹ Sannazzaro's eclogues were among the most popular Renaissance writings and were translated into other languages besides English. The fact that the Cambridge poet Phineas Fletcher did the English translation would have been an additional stimulus to Milton to read them.²

Milton is supposed to have read the poetry of Giambattista Marino while at Horton, after his graduation from Cambridge.³ He mentions having read Marino in his poem Ad Mansum and calls him "sweet voiced."⁴ Marino's meteoric rise to popularity and the sudden collapse of his reputation after the seventeenth century was due in part to the peculiar quality of his poetic devices, which Wilkins has summarized as: "strange metaphors, far-fetched conceits, hyperboles, antitheses, incongruities, strings of synonyms, even puns."⁵ Richard Crashaw, the English poet, translated Marino's Le Streghe degli Innocenti as The Suspicion of Herod and it was published in a popular edition in 1646. Another poem of Marino's which was not translated but which was known to have been popular with the poets Drummond and Crashaw, and might well have been with Milton, was the Adone, based on the familiar legend of Venus and Adonis.⁶

¹Wilkins, op. cit., p. 169.

²James Hanford, "The Pastoral Elegy and Milton's Lycidas" P.M.L.A., 25(September, 1910), p. 435, footnote 1.

³Federico Olivero, Saggi di Letteratura Inglese, p. 9.

⁴"dulciloquum."

⁵Wilkins, op. cit., p. 293.

⁶Arthur Nethercot, "Native Versus Foreign 'Metaphysical Poets' in England." M.L.R., 25(1930), pp. 152-164.

Apart from Milton's own references to the works of Dante and Petrarch, the known fact that he owned a copy of della Casa's works, and the popular Italian writing of his time which he might have read, other Italian influences on Milton have been deduced from internal evidence in his poems. An example of this sort of sleuthing was done by E. S. LeComte.¹ He took an image from Milton's poem, Lycidas--sheep swollen with rank mist--and associated it with the fact that at the time Milton was writing Lycidas he was living at Horton during a plague year, which was then commonly interpreted by ecclesiastical authorities as a visitation of the wrath of God on humankind for its misdeeds. Because Milton was supposed to have been reading Italian poets' works during this time, and because he mentioned later his own acquaintance with the works of Petrarch, the origin of the image was traced to a line in Petrarch's Querulus which was very similar and written under similar conditions after a plague in 1348.

The limitations of this sort of speculation are obvious. On the subject of Milton's reading, Robert Martin Adams has written:

While the aggregate of attributions has increased, the chance that any one of them is correct (beyond those for which there is explicit evidence) has, in compliance with a familiar law of probability, steadily diminished.²

The question is one of evidence. There is no overt evidence that Milton ever read any Italian poets other than Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, and della Casa. If he did, and even assuming that he read

¹E. S. LeComte, "Lycidas, Petrarch, and the Plague." M.L.N., 69(June, 1954), pp. 402-404.

²Robert Adams, Ikon: John Milton and the Modern Critics, p. 129.

far afield with the result that much of his work bears subtle influences of many Italian poets, mere speculation on these possibilities without overt evidence can shed little light on Milton's poetry until it is explained why Milton chose to use what he did.

Even assuming that Milton was influenced by those Italian poets for whom there is overt evidence that he had read their works, we must not rule out the possibility that Milton may have contrived something similar to what another poet wrote quite unconscious of any influence. Furthermore, it is easy to overlook in such studies the complex relationship which Italian literature and Italian poetry in particular had on Milton through an indirect source, the poetry of Edmund Spenser.

Spenser had been influenced by Italian poetry in many ways, at a time when Italian influences on English poetry were, insofar as extranational influences went, pretty much without rivals. It was some thirty or forty years after Spenser's death in 1599, during Milton's early years, that French influence on English literature came to rival the Italian. Spenser had made particular use of Italian canzoni in his poem Prothalamion, and had experimented with irregular canzone-stanzas in his Epithalamion. Milton knew his Spenser, as his lengthy quotations from The Faerie Queene in Animadversions and his references to the poet's works in Eikonoklastes and the Areopagitica testify. It is a workable hypothesis, as Ransom has demonstrated, that what may be accounted for in terms of Italian influence in Lycidas, for example, may better and more simply be accounted for in terms of Spenserian influ-

ence.¹

However, there is a final factor which militates in favor of giving careful attention to evidence of explicitly Italian poetic influences on Milton, and that was his trip to Italy. The fact that he was motivated highly enough to want to visit the homeland of Dante, Petrarch, della Casa, and Tasso indicates he was strongly attracted to their works and the literature and language of which they were a part. Furthermore, the fact that Milton received indirect Italian influences through the works of Spenser would not necessarily exclude the possibility of his also receiving direct influence from the works of Italian poets themselves, as well as from his trip to Italy.

MILTON IN ITALY

In April, 1638, John Milton received a passport and letters of recommendation for his Italian journey. Henry Lawes, his collaborator in the production of Comus, had been in Italy and recommended him to his friends there. Sir Henry Wotton, former Ambassador to Venice and later Provost of Eton College, wrote recommendations and included with them an itinerary which Milton seems to have followed closely.² As for his motive for the trip, in 1654 Milton replied to those critics who insisted he had left for Italy seeking a place of refuge after his temporary expulsion from Cambridge, by affirming that he had gone to Italy be-

¹John Crowe Ransom, "A Poem Nearly Anonymous" in: Criticism: The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment, pp. 356-365.

²Joseph M. French, The Life Records of John Milton, Volume 1, p. 359.

cause it was the "retreat of civility and of all polite learning."¹ The care with which he prepared for the journey, and the persons whom he visited, even those such as Manso and Cardinal Barberini who held religious views contrary to his own, indicate that Milton wanted to round out his education in the great centers of humanistic learning rather than to escape the consequences of his expulsion from Cambridge.

It seems quite likely, furthermore, that Milton anticipated having contact with seventeenth century Italian music and musicians, as well as with scholars and poets. Of all the arts, music commanded the most respect at the time, and a new form known as musical drama was becoming especially popular. It consisted of declaimed poetry, vocal solos and choral parts, orchestral interludes, and ballet.² Another musical form which had become popular in England as well as in Italy was the madrigal, and English madrigalists such as William Byrd had Italian counterparts of the stature of Alfonso Ferrabosco. How specific were Milton's interests in Italian music? In the Defensio Secunda, he makes it clear that he had looked forward to hearing Leonora Baroni sing, to seeing Cardinal Barberini's musical drama produced, and to using at least some of the time he spent in Venice to buy books on contemporary music.³ That is as much as can be known from his explicit comments on the matter.

¹Columbia Milton, Volume 8, pp. 113-115.

²Gretchen Finney, "A Musical Background for Lycidas." The Huntington Library Quarterly, 15(1951-1952), p. 338.

³French, op. cit., p. 368, pp. 370-371.

Milton reached Paris sometime in May, 1638. While there, he obtained further recommendations from Lord Scudamore, the British Ambassador. By June, he had left Paris, and having passed through Nice, Genoa, Leghorn, and Pisa, he arrived in Florence in September.¹

Florence was the home of the first and most important of the Renaissance Academies, the Platonic Academy founded by Marsilio Ficino around 1450. Ficino had written with some pride that the Academy was "accomplishing what had been revered among the ancients, (uniting) wisdom with eloquence, and prudence with the military arts."² The academies developed as informal associations distinct from universities, museums, and libraries, and by 1638 there were some five hundred of them in 133 Italian towns. Florence alone had twenty.³ The proliferation of their numbers had brought about a corresponding decline in the quality of their members' work, which was most noticeable in the growth of dilettantism and the narrowing of interests from the encyclopedic and humanistic studies of Latin and Greek, literature, and science, to what was frequently nothing more than hackwork in philology and literary bonvivandism.⁴ One Italian writer characterized the Florentine academic atmosphere at the time of Milton's visit as "pullulating...with cynicism and ridicule, showing the intellec-

¹Diego Angeli, Giovanni Milton, p. 12.

²Frances Yates, The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century, p. 4.

³David Masson, The Life of John Milton, Volume 1, pp. 763-764.

⁴Piero Rebora, "Milton a Firenze," Nuova Antologia, 88(Ottobre, 1953), pp. 151-152.

tual vacuity of a people in the marasmus of chronic political weakness."¹ It was into one of these associations of "worthy professional men and mediocre idlers"² that Milton was received in September, 1638, and to which he read some of his early compositions in Latin. He later recalled the reception given his work by the Accademia degli Apatisti in The Reason of Church Government, describing it as "acceptance above what was look't for" and that the work was received with encomiums.³ He was impressed by the members' effusive reception, perhaps especially so when one of them, Antonio Malatesti, made him a present of his book of sonnets entitled La Tina Equivoci in Cinquanta Sonnetti.⁴

The primary source for most of the information concerning Milton's stay in Italy is his commentary on the trip in his Defensio Secunda. An Italian writer, Piero Rebora, has concluded that one cannot always take what Milton says about himself at face value, especially with regard to his supposed meeting with Galileo. Milton mentions having "visited" Galileo in the Areopagitica (1644), but in the Defensio Secunda (1654), Milton describes his Italian journey without further reference to such a visit. While

¹"Accademia," Enciclopedia Italiana, Volume 1, p. 187.

²Rebora, loc. cit.

³Columbia Milton, Volume 3, Part One, p. 236.

⁴The book is now lost, although it was once inventoried as part of Milton's library. Malatesti was a rather picturesque poet who made a reputation for himself as an author of crude satire and suggestive riddles. The only originality of La Tina was what Masson called its "equivogue" quality and an Italian critic called its continual play of scurrilous and dirty double meanings. See:

French, op. cit., pp. 376-377.

Masson, op. cit., p. 786.

Rebora, op. cit., p. 154.

it was true that Carlo Dati, one of the Florentine academicians, wrote Milton a letter on December 6, 1648, in which he sent Milton greetings from Galileo, Rebera concluded after a study of the historical evidence that Milton had not actually seen or visited with Galileo.¹ Galileo was under close surveillance by the Inquisition in September, 1638. Only a few months before, he had needed a special decree from his Inquisitor to go a few steps out of his house to attend Mass. The Ambassador from Holland was denied admission to Galileo because he was a Protestant. Galileo's Inquisitor, one Muzarelli Funano, forbade Galileo to speak with any suspect person. Funano also wrote that Galileo at this time was despondent, more dead than alive, and hopelessly blind. Under those conditions, it was extremely unlikely that a self-acknowledged Protestant traveler from England would have been allowed an interview with him. Perhaps, Rebera concluded, Milton caught a glimpse of the old man sunning himself on his balcony, as he was wont to do every day.²

Whether or not we may believe Milton on the subject of his meeting with Galileo, there is historical evidence for an event Milton recorded in his Defensio Secunda. The records of the Accademia degli Svogliati in Florence show that Milton read a "very learned poem in hexameters" to the assembled members on September 16th.³ In the same month, Milton wrote Benedetto Buonmattai, a

¹Rebera, loc. cit.
Columbia Milton, Volume 4, p. 330.
 French, op. cit., pp. 380-381.

²Rebera, op. cit., pp. 159-162.

³French, op. cit., p. 389.

priest, professor, and Dante scholar with whom Milton seems to have struck up a warm friendship, indicating that he had read some of Buonmattel's work and was pleased with his own growing command of Italian. Considering the fact that Milton had appeared before two of the Florentine academies within the month and had acquitted himself well each time, and that he had ingratiated himself with the older and respected Buonmattel, it seems clear that Milton was in good command of his Latin and Italian and was making a good first impression.

During October and November of 1638, Milton journeyed from Florence to Rome. The Church of St. Peter in Rome had been completed only shortly before he arrived, and what objective evidence there is of his stay indicates that Milton toured Rome in the way any intelligent English tourist of his tastes would have. He dined at the English College. He used his letters of introduction to obtain an interview with Alexander Cherubini, the great scholar, who, Masson conjectured, in turn introduced him to Lucas Holstenius, Secretary to Cardinal Barberini, keeper of manuscripts of the Vatican library and graduate of Oxford University. It was perhaps Holstenius who introduced Milton to the great Cardinal himself, the urbane, self-appointed "Cardinal Protector of England" who was the center of a circle of literati and would eventually become Pope.¹

Cardinal Barberini invited Milton to see a lavishly-produced musical drama which he had written, entitled Chi Soffra Speri.

¹Masson, op. cit., pp. 793-801.

The entertainment lasted for some five hours, and its spectacular effects included the appearance onstage of ox-drawn carts, carriages, dancing girls, and a complete fair. Smart has remarked that at this time Milton showed himself far from sharing the spirit of William Prynne, the Puritan pamphleteer and contemporary of his.¹ Milton seems to have greatly enjoyed the performance, and remarked later with some pride that the Cardinal sought him out in the crowd to greet him.

It is likely that Milton did not hear Leonora Baroni, the famous singer and protege of the Cardinal, until later, at a private entertainment arranged by the Cardinal himself. Women did not perform in public in the Cardinal's theater but did perform in private for the Cardinal's own circle, and it is probable that after one of these performances Milton composed the graceful Latin epigrams in her honor which appeared in the 1645 edition of his poems.

If Milton had expected to meet with hostility in Rome, he must have been disappointed. He seems to have been greeted with great cordiality, and there are no indications in his later writing that anyone treated him with anything other than understanding and politeness.²

After two months, Milton left Rome for Naples. In the Defensio Secunda, he mentioned that it was only en route that he decided to visit Giovanni Battista Manso, Marquis of Villa, the close

¹John S. Smart, "Milton in Rome." M.L.R., 8(1913), pp. 91-92.
Eugene Schuyler, "Milton's Leonora," The Nation, 47(October 18, 1888), pp. 310-312.

²Angeli, op. cit., p. 37.

friend and former protector of the poet Tasso, after he was urged to do so by a hermit with whom he traveled and who later introduced them.¹ Milton gives an account of his visit with Manso in his Latin poem Ad Mansum. He talked more specifically and at greater length with the aged Manso than with any other person during his entire Italian tour. They discussed religion, apparently not without heat. They spoke about Tasso, with whose works Milton was already familiar. Milton may well have heard at some length those views about poetry and Tasso's contribution to the development of blank verse from Manso which the latter had incorporated in his biography entitled Vita di Tasso, published at about that time. Manso gave Milton a gift and a charming, if somewhat chiding, epigram on his religion which the latter reproduced at the head of the tributes to his poems in the 1645 edition. In January, 1639, Milton again returned to Rome.²

In 1654, in the Defensio Secunda, Milton wrote of his second visit to Rome as having been undertaken against the advice of English merchants in Naples, who had heard about his free expression of Protestant views with Manso and feared for his safety. The account apparently provoked both amusement and skepticism, for in 1655, in the Defensio Pro Se, Milton was obliged to state that he had not meant to posture as a martyr in describing his return to Rome.³ All that is known about Milton's relations with the Roman Catholic hierarchy indicates that it was unlikely that Milton

¹ Columbia Milton, Volume 8, pp. 123-125.

² French, op. cit., p. 403.

³ Columbia Milton, Volume 9, p. 183.

could seriously have held any fears about his return. He was given all the freedom he wanted. He admitted that he never spoke about religion unless he was spoken to first--an attitude which could hardly have created problems for him. It is possible also that during his second visit to Rome, Milton was invited by the Cardinal to hear Leonora Baroni sing and was invited by Lucas Holstenius to inspect the Medicean codex. Holstenius made Milton a present of two books.¹ With this as background for his later reminiscences, it is a credit only to Milton's intransigent anti-Catholicism and his own tendency for constant self-justification that he spoke of his second visit to Rome as he did in the Defensio Secunda.²

In March, 1639, Milton was again in Florence.³ Surveillance had been increased around Galileo, and it is even less likely that Milton could have visited him during this time.⁴ The records of the Accademia degli Svogliati show that Milton read some of his verses on March 17th and 24th, and that he attended the Academy meeting on March 31st. In the audience was his friend, Carlo Dati, who was later an art critic and historian, antiquarian, and popular intellectual. Dati was then only nineteen years old, and it was from him that Milton received the most graceful of the encomiums which were printed in the group of tributes in the 1645 edition of his poems.⁵

¹French, op. cit., pp. 406-408.

²Rebora, op. cit., p. 160.

³French, loc. cit.

⁴Rebora, op. cit., p. 161.

⁵Masson, op. cit., pp. 821-823; pp. 780-786.

Not long after his appearance at the Accademia degli Svogliati in April, 1639, Milton left for Ferrara and Venice.¹ Masson attempted to date the "inspiration" for Milton's sonnets in Italian during this part of the trip, arguing that Milton forded the Reno River at Malabergo, between Bologna and Ferrara, and had some personal experience with a young woman which caused him later to write the sonnets.² He admitted that this was tenuous proof for the dating, acknowledging that they might well have been written in England before Milton left. Most commentators now feel that there is a more prosaic explanation for the composition of the poems as exercises in Italian, and date them about the year 1629, when Charles Diodati, to whom one of the sonnets was addressed, matriculated at Geneva.

It is important to think of Milton in Italy as he was, not as a Byron or a Shelley. He gave every indication of having been a young man who took himself very seriously and who wanted to round out his humanistic education by visiting the home of humanistic studies. He gave every indication of understanding Italian literature in his relations with academicians, and what he seemed to have been looking for and what he found in his visit to Italy was confirmation of his opinion of the greatness of its literary past. In his Epitaphium Damonis, written in 1640 in England, Milton made reference to those persons whom he had considered important during his stay in Italy, and they corresponded in part to those from whom he had received written tributes. In his

¹French, op. cit., p. 414.

²Masson, op. cit., p. 826.

poem, he returned some graceful compliments to Carlo Dati and Manso, as well as to Antonio Francini, who today seems distinguished only by his tribute to Milton.¹ One may well ask why Milton chose tributes from these men, as well as from Antonio Malatesti of La Tina renown, to introduce and endorse his own edition of poems. It was conventional at the time to introduce new works with tributes--thus Wotton's letter was prefaced to Comus. Furthermore, while none of the Italians was to rise to great fame in the eyes of later generations, their tributes to Milton's poetry were presented to English readers as endorsements of "colleagues in a common enterprise" (in the words of Milton's own introduction)--that of carrying on the great work of the humanists of the early Renaissance. It was surely this bond which Milton must have felt with those scholars, poets, and dilettantes whom he visited in Italy.

MILTON'S POEMS IN ITALIAN

In 1629, while still at Cambridge, John Milton wrote five sonnets and part of a canzone in Italian.² Prince has shown that these poems were experiments in form and style and were unique in that Milton, when writing in Italian, represented himself for the only time in his life as a young lover.³ There is little reason

¹French, op. cit., Volume 2, p. 16.

²Rebora, op. cit., pp. 151-152.

³In the 1645 edition, the sonnets were numbered I through X; numbers I and VII through X were in English, while numbers II through VI were in Italian. The canzone was not numbered, but appeared between sonnets III and IV.

³Prince, op. cit., pp. 97-98.

to suppose that Milton was really in love with anyone when he wrote the poems, despite the efforts of Masson to prove it. Rather, Milton adopted the conventional Petrarchan stance of a young lover in writing his sonnets, and the tone of the poems gives us much the same impression as it gave Prince: that Milton was chiefly concerned with the "oddity of his writing poetry in a foreign language: an oddity...explained by the further oddity of his finding himself in love."¹

In what sense are these "Italian" poems? Of course, they are written in the Italian language. At first glance, the sonnets seem to follow the regular Petrarchan stanza-pattern of an octave, in which certain subject-matter is developed, followed by a sestet in which some new emotional quality or "turn" is given it. On close inspection, Olivero found that there were variations in the form of the sonnets. Numbers II and VI close with tercets in rhyme schemes cde/cde, while numbers IV and V close with tercets cdc/dee.² Furthermore, some of the sonnets seem to have no break in the sense or "turn" between the octave and sestet.³ An example of this may be found in Sonnet VI:

Giovane piano, a semplicetto amante
 Poi che fuggir me stesso in dubbio sono
 Madonna a voi del mio cuor l'umil dono
 Farò divoto; io certo a prove tante
 L'ebbi fidele, intrepido, costante,
 De pensieri leggiadro, accorto, e buono;
 Quando rugge il gran mondo e scoccea il tuono
 S'arma di se, e d'intero diamante,
 Tanto del forse, e d'invidia sicuro,
 Di timori, e speranze al popol use

¹Ibid., p. 98.

²Olivero, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³Smart, *Sonnets of John Milton*, p. 38.

Quanto d'ingegno, e d'alto valor vago,
 E di cetra sonora, e delle muse:
 Sol troverete in tal parte men duro
 Ove amor mise l'insansabil ago.¹

Quatrains one and two are joined by a run-on line, instead of being separated by an end-stopped one. The contrasting development of ideas about his gift begins in line seven, and the only "turn" involving a dramatic shift in emphasis occurs in lines thirteen and fourteen in which the allusion is made to the worldly loves of his heart. We may also observe that one of the fundamental themes of Petrarchan poetry was the conflict between human love and the love of God.² While Milton strove to make this the theme of his sonnet, yet he succeeds only in making himself sound consciously noble as he devotes the "well-disciplined" thoughts of his heart to his "Madonna."

We may compare Milton's sonnet to the opening lines of one of the sonnets of Giovanni della Casa which Milton owned. These lines show what was characteristic of della Casa's poetry: the fusion which was effected in it between complex word-arrangement and Petrarchan sonnet-form to give a new quality to the sonnet which Tasso later called the "heroic sonnet". Della Casa's lines are

¹Columbia Milton, Volume 1, Part 1, p. 58. Translated:
 "Ingenious youth and guileless lover I, certain I cannot be
 of being ever other than I am. Devotedly, therefore, my Lady, I
 make thee humble gift of my heart."

That heart, as I can vow after tests innumerable, I have
 found faithful, fearless, steadfast--in all its thoughts, kindly,
 tactful, genial. In the face of the roar and thunder of the great
 world, it girdeth itself with the impenetrable adamant of self
 confidence as safe from the doubts and envies, the fears and hopes,
 of the vulgar, as it is enamoured of talent and noble worth, of
 poetry and the Muses.

One weakness in it wilt thou find; the spot wherein Love
 hath pierced his incurable dart!" (*Ibid.*, p. 59)

²Wilkins, *op. cit.*, p. 84, pp. 254-255.

addressed to a friend, Nicolo Phrisio:

Phrisio, che gia da questa gente a quella
 Passando vago, a fama in ciascun lato
 Mercado, hai poco mon cerco e girato,
 Quante riscalda la diurna stella;¹

Rendered in English in the same word-order, this would be:

Phrisio, who while from one nation to another
 (has been) pleasantly passing, and fame in all
 winning, hast circled scarce² less and travelled through
 all that the day-star warms;

and it is apparent that della Casa uses several devices to render complex the rather conventional compliment being paid his friend. For example, he places Phrisio's name ceremoniously at the beginning of the first line and then apostrophizes him in a series of relative clauses, some of which are inserted within one another, thus giving the rhetorical style a quality of great deliberateness.³ The effect in lines one through four of Milton's sonnet, in which he apostrophizes himself before directly addressing his "Lady", is not unlike this.

While Milton might not have been able to emulate Petrarch's inner experience of conflict between love of a woman and love of heaven, it was possible for him to write sonnets in the conventional Petrarchan stanza-form without the suspense-and-turn ("volta") pattern. Milton's reading in della Casa's work would have given him examples of ways in which della Casa had broken down the formal convention of end-stopped lines and introduced

¹Prince, op. cit., p. 16.

²Loc. cit.

³Prince, op. cit., p. 17.

run-on ones.¹ Milton undoubtedly knew his Petrarch well enough to remember that Petrarch himself had written a sonnet ("O sonno, o della queta...") which consisted of a single and continuous train of thought.²

Sonnets III and V resemble number VI in that they lack a turn at the ninth line, while numbers IV and V have the turn. The form of the canzone which Milton wrote was freer. Italian convention dictated that it be rhymed, of several stanzas, uniform throughout as to form and natural in the progression of its thought.³ English and Italian critics have agreed that Milton's canzone, although only one stanza of a canzone, is an example of his most masterful use of the Italian language, and among the Italian poems his greatest success in that he adapted the structure of the canzone to a subject outside the range usual to the form--an explanation of why he wrote his poems in Italian.⁴

On the whole, there has been very little evaluation of Milton's poems in Italian by Italian critics. Masson indicated in a footnote that he had asked the opinion of one Signor Saffi on them, and he had replied that while they showed irregularities in idiom and form and occasional false taste, they were generally correct and indicated that Milton was attentive to what had gone on in Italian poetry from Petrarch to Tasso.⁵ Later, the Italian

¹Smart, op. cit., p. 31.

²Ibid., p. 35.

³James Glassford, ed., Lyrical Compositions, p. vii.

⁴Wilkins, op. cit., p. 293, thought this was a madrigal.

⁵Masson, op. cit., p. 826.

critic Federico Olivero examined the poems in great detail. He pointed out the weaknesses which Saffi had mentioned, but also indicated that their strength lay in the "harmonious discordance" of their principal conceits, which in turn created first tension and then resolution in their logical structure. Olivero also pointed out that the canzone which Milton wrote was, in fact, only the first stanza of one. In addition, he extracted lines from both the sonnets and the canzone which corresponded almost exactly to lines found in various canzoni of Petrarch. Olivero considered Milton's poems in Italian of interest insofar as they revealed how Milton experimented with writing in another language, but he concluded that the poems on the whole lacked "musicality" and were "weak."¹

However, apart from their worth as specimens of Italian poetry, the canzone and sonnets have another value. In writing them, Milton apparently did not attempt merely to follow out an exercise in composition. Using the form of the canzone, he explained why it was he wrote his poems in Italian, saying that it was the language of which "love was proud." The use of this subject-matter in a canzone is without precedent in Italian poetry.² In writing the sonnets in Italian, Milton used the sonnet stanza as originated by Petrarch but used those sorts of modifications such as run-on lines and variations in the suspense-and-turn construction which had been introduced by della Casa. In Milton's use of the

¹ Olivero, op. cit., pp. 12-17.

² Smart, op. cit., p. 149.

canzone and the sonnet forms, Prince observed that Milton's chief interest lay in "disciplined improvisation" and that it was this quality which gave the verse its strength.¹

In addition, Milton paid particular attention to an aspect of syntax in these poems which is of importance in his sonnets in English as well. Prince has named it parallelism. There are ten examples of adjectives, verbs, and prepositional phrases which are arranged in pairs in the poems in Italian to describe a single object or action. For example, in Sonnet six we find:

Quando rugge il gran mondo, e scocca il tuono
S'arma di se, e d'intero diamante,
Tanto del forse, e d'invidia sicuro,
Di timori, e speranzæ, e d'alto valor vago
E di cetra sonora, e delle muse:²

Della Casa had been the first Italian poet to describe a single object or action in his sonnets with a corresponding parallel construction in the syntax. The effect of such parallelism was to give a sort of balance to the poems, to introduce antithesis as well as thesis, and give the effect of an equilibrium between them.³ Milton's use of this technique gave his rhetorical style a quality like della Casa's, which Prince termed "pleonastic," i. e., a predominance of the number of words used over the number

¹Prince, op. cit., p. 89.

²Columbia Milton, Volume 1, Part One, pp. 58-59. Translation:
 when the great heavens roar and flies the thunder
 (His Heart) stands armed in itself and in pure diamond
 As much secure from envy and from chance
 From fears and hopes such as the many use,
 And it is fain of virtue and high thought
 And of the sounding lyre and the Muse:
 (Prince, op. cit., pp. 95-96).

³Ibid., pp. 93-96.

of things said.¹

How far can one go in making inferences about Milton's Italian models and his acquaintance with Italian literature on the basis of a reading of his poems in Italian? The octave-sestet construction of the sonnets was Petrarchan, but the fact that some of the poems seem to lack a "turn" would seem to suggest that Milton was also familiar with della Casa. So would the parallelism and pleonastic tendency.

Yet a commonsense view of the matter suggests that the latter may be explained from another point of view. It is possible that Milton constructed these with an eye to the kind of parallelism and pleonasm found in Euphues and the speeches of Falstaff, rather than to that of della Casa. We may take as an example Falstaff's rejoinder to Prince Hal and Hostess Quickly in Henry IV, Part One, Act I, scene iv:

Peace, good pint pot; peace, good ticklebrain.
 Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy
 time, but also how thou art accompanied. For though
 the camomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster
 it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted, the sooner
 it wears. That thou art my son, I have partly
 thy mother's word, partly my own opinion, but chiefly
 a villainous trick of thine eye, and a foolish hanging
 of thy nether lip, that doth warrant me. If then
 thou be son to me, here lies the point; why, being son
 to me, art thou so pointed at?²

However, the fact that parallelistic construction is common to both euphuistic writing, which Milton surely knew, and della Casa's sonnets, for which there is objective evidence of Milton's knowl-

¹Ibid., p. 97.

²G. B. Harrison, ed., Shakespeare, Major Plays and Sonnets, p. 352.

edge, does not necessarily imply that influences must have come only from one, at the expense of the other. It is entirely possible that influences from both sources were at work, but as the parallelistic technique was applied to poetry written in Italian, surely della Casa's work is reflected in Milton's verse. Milton worked consciously with his materials, sensible of the Italian literature he knew and which lay behind and around his own poems. Adams has said of Milton and his library something which is true in the specific instance of Milton and Italian poetry:

(Milton) approached few authors in the spirit of a man seeking permission to hold an opinion or borrow an expression, but sat over most of his library as a judge, if not as a conqueror.¹

THE EARLY MINOR POEMS

If one of Milton's achievements in writing the poems in Italian was to demonstrate a "disciplined improvisation", a similar achievement was demonstrated in those early minor poems which show the influence of Italian models. There are four such poems: On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, On Time, Upon the Circumcision, and At a Solemn Musick.

If we accept the possibility that Milton's arrangement of the poems in the 1645 edition followed the chronological order of their composition, then the first written was On the Morning of Christ's Nativity.² It has previously been pointed out that Patterson found this poem embodied a number of typically Renaissance humanistic tendencies: namely, the concern for man instead of

¹Adams, op. cit., p. 176.

²Prince, op. cit., p. 90.

merely for God in religious poetry, the careful, precise, almost sensuous descriptions of the subject matter, and the references to pre-Christian deities and cultures.¹ H. J. C. Grierson, in a study of Milton's early poetry, qualified this judgment with the important reservation that unlike the humanist poet Petrarch, Milton does not really convince the reader that he participates in the action he describes. Milton gives the impression more of being a scholarly, fastidious onlooker, and the tone of the poems is a "kind of fastidious Puritan Epicureanism."²

Milton does give the impression to the reader of being scholarly and fastidious in the Nativity ode. The opening section, written in stanzas of rime royal, gives the poem a precise yet musical quality not unlike that of certain fourteenth century lyrics or of certain of Spenser's poems.³ The wealth of allusions to traditional religious and classical figures is also impressive.

While the metrics of the Hymn proper, and the inverted noun-adjective word order in such expressions as "dark foundations deep" and "flowre-inwov'n tresses torn" owe more to Spenser than to any Italian poet, certain stylistic and formal characteristics can ultimately be traced to Italian prototypes. In this poem, as in the poems in Italian, the adjectives are frequently arranged in parallel fashion. While the alexandrines with which the stanzas of the Hymn close again affirm the Spenserian character of the poem, the more general movements of ideas within the stanzas

¹Patterson, The Student's Milton, Notes, p. 45.

²H. J. C. Grierson, Cross Currents in English Literature of the XVIIth Century, p. 242.

³Prince, op. cit., p. 60.

are canzone-like.¹

Some of the subject-matter of the poem indicates direct Italian influence. The enumeration in stanzas twenty-two through twenty-four of the pagan gods overthrown by the coming of Christ is the only known parallel in English with an almost identical passage in Tasso's Rime Sacre.²

With regard to the poem On Time, there has been a difference of opinion over whether it is a madrigal or a canzone. E. M. W. Tillyard and Ants Oras have maintained that the poem was written as a canzone. Prince has pointed out, however, that On Time was written in the less exacting form of a madrigal.³ Like the canzone, the madrigal was a short, rhymed poem, but in verses of differing lengths, with no restriction as to form, metrics, or terminal rhymes.⁴ As conceived of by two of its most famous practitioners, Tasso and Marino, the madrigal tended to be epigrammatic, drawing its subject-matter from pictures or statues.⁵ Milton was the first English poet to write a madrigal on anything but trifling subject-matter. On Time was written as an inscription for a clock case and its success may be measured both by the ingenuity with which the original purpose for the poem was concealed within the discussion of time in general, as well as by the tone of the end-

¹Loc. cit.

²James Hanford, A Milton Handbook, p. 141.

³Prince, op. cit., p. 63.

⁴Glassford, op. cit., p. xi.

⁵The madrigal also had a close relation to music. See "Madrigale," Enciclopedia Italiana, Volume 21, pp. 852-855.

ing, which is pitched to some gravity and fervor.¹ An additional interesting feature of the poem is the occasional four-stress lines which occur; Italian madrigals usually hewed to a regular heptasyllabic line, although English madrigals were freer in form.

The third of the early minor poems which shows Italian influences is Upon the Circumcision. Brooks and Hardy, in their introduction to their edition to Poems of Mr. John Milton called Upon the Circumcision a loosely-constructed poem of two verse-paragraphs, which, because of variations in the lengths of lines, may have been an early experiment with the metrical patterns which Milton later used in Lycidas.² However, their conclusion was based on an inadequate reading of the poem. The two stanzas are scrupulously alike, with the exception of a feminine rhyme in the first stanza. Both Prince,³ in England, and Oras,⁴ in the United States, pointed out at nearly the same time that Upon the Circumcision is, in fact, a regular canzone which is nearly identical in meter and rhyme with Tasso's canzone entitled Alla Beatissima Vergine in Loreto. Significantly, Tasso used this particular form for his canzone only once, which would strongly indicate that if Milton used a model, he used this one. Furthermore, the Trinity College manuscript of the poem showed that Milton had

¹Prince, op. cit., p. 64.

²Cleanth Brooks and Robert Hardy, eds., Poems of Mr. John Milton, p. 265.

³Prince, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

⁴Oras, "Milton's Upon the Circumcision and Tasso," N.&Q., 197(1952), pp. 314-315.

originally written the ending couplets in each stanza as single lines with internal rhymes in each. The marginal revisions, which were the final printed form of the poem, turned the stanza into one more familiar to English readers; the original version of the poem, however, was identical in form with that of Tasso.

The fourth poem, At a Solemn Musick, is a madrigal similar in construction to On Time. Milton's experiments with a four-stress line are more frequent in this one, as are the long and elaborate sentences which were to become a stylistic feature of his later poetry.¹ With these more complex rhythmic and syntactical devices at his disposal, Milton was able to bring about a greater unity in the poem than merely through use of rhyme and meter. One critic has pointed to one of the stanzaic characteristics of this poem--namely, that the initial rhyme is separated by three couplets (abbccdda)--in order to show that the poem resembles Petrarch's fourteenth Canzone in Vita. Yet while such a similarity does exist, merely pointing to it does not explain why Milton chose this stanzaic form. Was Milton's chief end in the composition of the madrigals to experiment with stanza form or to experiment with complex sentences within stanza forms? If it were the latter, Milton would have been following the Italian madrigalists and writers of canzoni who used freedom of stanza form to experiment with complex sentences. That Milton was attempting this we see evidenced in lines seventeen to twenty-four of At a

¹Prince, op. cit., p. 65.

Solemn Musick:

That we on earth with undiscording voice
 May rightly answer that medodious noise;
 As once we did, till disproportion'd sin
 Jarr'd against nature's chime, and with harsh din
 Broke the fair musick that all creatures made
 to their great Lord, whose love their motion sway'd
 In perfect Diapason, whilst they stood
 In first obedience, and their state of good.¹

This passage is made up of a single elaborate sentence which is written in iambic pentameter couplets. The only end-stopped line is the second. The running-on of the other lines makes the verse's rhetoric unlike that usually associated with couplets. The reader receives the impression of a verse of complex but euphonic wholeness, rather than of epigrammatic couplets. The rhythm of the run-ons carries the subject-matter and sense of the lines beyond line-endings and into larger rhetorical units as in the lines:

As once we did, till disproportion'd sin
 Jarr'd against nature's chime, and with harsh din
 Broke the fair musick that all creatures made
 To their great Lord...

The effect is enhanced by the trochaic substitutions in the beginnings of lines two and three and the pyrrhic, of two light accents, beginning line four. The trochees seem to impel the reader forward, while the pyrrhic seems to help him reach a rhetorical (though not a grammatical) pause at the words "great Lord."

Dr. Johnson's complaint that Milton never learned the art of doing little things with grace is misleading, especially when seen in the light of the deliberate craftsmanship of the verse. Mil-

¹Columbia Milton, Volume 1, Part One, p. 28.

ton's little poems, in the veritable surge of their rhetoric, certainly give the reader the impression that Milton was trying to make of them poems which would strain the limitations of their forms to the uttermost with their sonority. Milton was obviously not content merely to do something little, although the poems themselves are not long. However, that they are carefully constructed no reader could deny.

One other feature of the four early poems here mentioned has been singled out by critics, and that is their "deliberate aim at a kind of sustained music."¹ At line nine, On Time rises from the prosaic discussion of time into discourse on eternity. The cherubic host of the first sixteen lines of At a Solemn Musick is answered by discordant earthly voices, and resolved only by a prayer beginning at line twenty-five. Although Brooks' and Hardy's observations on the form of the poems were erroneous, their observation that these poems may have been experiments with the form that Milton later used in Lycidas may not be entirely wrong when considered in the light of the "musical structure" of the latter poem.²

Italian influences on the early minor poems may be summarized as follows: in subject-matter and point-of-view, the Nativity Ode shows typical humanistic features, while in the enumeration of pagan gods there are indications of influences from Tasso. On Time is a madrigal, a form which had Italian origins. Upon the Circumcision, a canzone, gives every indication of having been

¹Eustace Tillyard, Milton, pp. 61-64.

²See pages 56-58.

modeled after the rhyme scheme and metrical pattern of one of Tasso's canzoni, while At a Solemn Musick, a madrigal, evidences a kind of rhetorical complexity which was frequently experimented with by Italian poets who wrote in this form.

THE SONNETS IN ENGLISH

Like the sonnets in Italian and the early minor poems, the sonnets in English show the use of certain techniques which have been discussed: namely, the Petrarchan stanza forms, the modifications in line-formation and sentence construction, and the arrangement of nouns, adjectives, and prepositional phrases in parallel construction with a resulting pleonastic tendency. Assuming that the arrangement of the poems in the 1645 edition reflects the order in which they were written, the sonnets in English were the first in which Milton made sustained use of all these techniques.

Sonnet I ("O nightingale...") was written in the Petrarchan stanza form and was described by Prince as follows:

To look at the Sonnet to the Nightingale and the "three and twentieth year" Sonnet in search of these Italian mannerisms [e.g., parallelism] is to find exactly at what point they entered Milton's English verse. The Sonnet to the Nightingale is indeed Italian in its form and matter. It recalls Bembo in its slightly solemn trifling, its very literary tone, and even in the epigrammatic turn of its conclusion.¹

Yet, Prince continues, Sonnet I lacks any other identifying features which might stamp it as bearing Italian influences.

However, Sonnet VII ("How soon hath Time the subtle thief

¹Prince, op. cit., p. 96.

of youth...") which immediately follows the sonnets in Italian does show the use of parallelistic techniques, and suggests that Milton may have transferred those techniques to use in his English poetry only after having once experimented with them in his Italian poetry.¹ There are some four pairs of adjectives arranged in parallel fashion in the closing sestet:

How soon hath Time the subtle thief of youth,
Stoln on his wing my three and twentieth year!
My hasting dayes flie on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.

Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth,
That I to manhood am arriv'd so near,
And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
That som more timely-happy spirits indu'th.

Yet if be less or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure eev'n,
To that same lot, however mean, or high,

Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav'n;
All is, if I have grace to use it so,²
As ever in my great task Masters eye.

Furthermore, there are two nouns, "Time" and "will", arranged in parallel in line twelve.³ While Sonnet I was written in one long sentence, broken by rhetorical pauses marked by a semicolon and a colon, Sonnet VII is written in three sentences, each arranged so as to fit nicely into the octave-sestet construction of the sonnet. Furthermore, none of the sentences seems overly long or inflated.

Whereas both Sonnets I and VII are similar in that sense and sentence units coincide with line and quatrain endings, Sonnet IX

¹As pointed out previously, the sonnets were arranged so that the first was in English, the second through the sixth in Italian, and the seventh through the tenth in English.

²Columbia Milton, Volume 1, Part One, p. 60.

³Prince, *loc. cit.*

indicates that Milton was beginning to modify even this characteristic of his sonnet structure.¹ Like della Casa, Milton used complex word-order in a sonnet dealing with the commonplace in order to make the commonplace seem exceptional, through what Prince called "an interplay of the expected and the unexpected."² Milton achieved this complexity by arranging rather ordinary allusions to the Old Testament and the classics in clauses and phrases which were inverted, interpolated, and then completed, and by placing sentence endings at points which did not always correspond to line-endings. This is especially true in lines five through eight:

Lady that in the prime of earliest youth,
Wisely hast shun'd the broad way and the green,
And with those few art eminently seen,
That labour up the Hill of heav'nly Truth,
The better part with Mary, and with Ruth,
Chosen thou hast, and they that overween,
And at thy growing vertues fret their spleen,
No anger find in thee, but pity and ruth.
Thy care is fixt and zealously attends
To fill thy odorous Lamp with deeds of light,
And Hope that reaps not shame. Therefore be sure
Thou, when the Bridegroom with his feastfull friends
Passes to bliss at the mid hour of night,
Hast gain'd thy entrance, Virgin wise and pure.³

Besides the obvious use of parallelistic techniques, we see also that the content of line five turns out to be the object, not the subject of the verb in line six; the last half of line six is the subject of a new clause within which still another is inserted; and in line eight, the object and verb of the same clause are reversed in order. Prince was of the opinion that this was an "absolutely new" technique in English poetry for creating tension and

¹Smart, op. cit., p. 26.

²Prince, op. cit., p. 104.

³Columbia Milton, Volume 1, Part One, p. 61.

rigor in a not very complex thought.¹ However, at this point it would be well to recall the discussion of euphuistic rhetorical devices in connection with Milton's poems in Italian. While this technique may have been new to English poetry, it was not new to English prose. If Milton received any influences in the use of such techniques, they may have come from Lyly and Shakespeare rather than from della Casa and the Italians. However, the fact that influences may have come from two sources does not necessarily imply that influence from one source would exclude influence from the other.

One additional quality of Sonnet IX suggests that it bears particularly Italian influences. That is its "roughness." Italian poets, beginning with della Casa and Tasso, were influenced by a movement toward asprezza ("roughness"), the purpose of which was to make the treatment of subject-matter more dramatic by making it more complex. Complexity was achieved through lengthening of phrases, suspension of the sense, and in the verse, through accumulations of consonants, collisions of open vowels, and the use of parallelistic techniques.² In Milton's sonnet, most of these are present: the general qualities, such as length of rhetorical units and suspension of sense, as well as the particular ones, such as parallelistic phrasing (the "Mary" and "Ruth" of line five, the verbs "overween" and "fret" in lines six and seven, and "pity" and "ruth" in line eight), and accumula-

¹Prince, op. cit., pp. 105-106.

²Ibid., pp. 38-39.

tions of vowels (especially in line six: "Chosen thou hast..."). The tendency in Milton's style here was toward pleonasm, not away from it.

In writing sonnets, Milton was nearly alone among the poets of his time. The others had abandoned the sonnet form and "concoits" in attempts to re-form English prosody along lines of classical purity and precision.¹ In much the same spirit as the classical Purists, some modern critics have attacked Milton's "Latinate" style. In their vanguard was F. R. Leavis, who found himself "flinching from the foreseen thud that comes so inevitably" in Milton. He regarded Milton's diction as stylized and unexpressive, and observed that Milton showed a greater feeling for words than he showed a capacity for feeling through them. T. S. Eliot called Milton's style "magniloquent"--that is, that it was "not doing as much as its impressive pomp and volume seemed to indicate."²

However, these critics confused two influences which bore on the shaping of Milton's style. While the two influences were not unrelated to each other ultimately, they were not of equal importance in the shaping of his style. The syntax of Milton's writings in Latin may have shared certain characteristics with his short poems in Italian and English, but even so, in his Latin writings, Milton followed classical syntactical patterns scrupulously. He

¹Olivero, op. cit., p. 11.
 Smart, op. cit., p. 13.
 Hanford, op. cit., p. 172.

²Leavis, op. cit., p. 126, quoting Eliot.

was not in any way trying to introduce something new into Latin prose style.¹ Milton's English style, however, was consciously Italianate. Milton's motives here were not of slavish imitation, but rather of clear-minded experimentation. Even E. M. W. Tillyard, who defended Milton's style from the attacks of Leavis and Eliot, made the mistake of assuming that Milton's style was "Latin-ate", and tried to defend it on the grounds that during the seventeenth century, the concept of good poetic style moved from that of "connotative profusion" to that of "denotative austerity."²

If both critics and defenders of Milton's style had acted merely on the grounds that any poet who intentionally strives to make his subject-matter difficult to comprehend is defeating the purpose of art, they might have raised more valuable issues. However, the evidence available indicates that Milton's approach to style in his early poetry was that of seeking ways in which English could be made a more expressive language by the use of complex syntactical devices with which Italian poets had experimented. In doing so, he gave evidence that his earlier exercises in writing Italian poetry had not been wasted, nor had his reading in della Casa, for they, among other possible influences including the euphuistic, had helped him achieve this goal.

¹There is a question as to the extent to which Milton's Latin style was influenced by Renaissance Italian Latinists. See Hanford, P.M.L.A., pp. 402-447.

²Tillyard, The Miltonic Setting, pp. 131-138.

LYCIDAS

The longest of the poems in the 1645 edition of Milton's verse which shows Italian influences is also the one which has invited the most comment. That poem is Lycidas. A veritable verbal smokescreen hides this poem, with critics and partisans, scholars and historians arranged in phalanxes around it in full battle dress.

In beginning a discussion of Italian influences on the poem, we might return to that venerable early critic of Milton's poetry, Dr. Johnson. He disliked Lycidas intensely. He felt that the poem was a failure partly because it was not "the effusion of real passion" (e.g., its imagery sounded like a recitation of conventions from a college text on pastoral poetry) and therefore was "inherently improbable," and partly because its diction was "harsh," its rhymes "uncertain," and the numbers "unpleasing."¹ By uncertain rhymes, Johnson presumably meant the fourth of his definitions for the word in his dictionary, "unsettled or unregular," and by unpleasing numbers, unpleasing meter.²

Had Dr. Johnson not deserted his earlier insights into the part which "the Italians" had played in the shaping of Milton's early poems for this summary judgment of all that he found unpleasant, he might have felt differently about the success of the

¹Johnson, op. cit., pp. 83-92.

²French Fogle, "Milton Lost and Regained," The Huntington Library Quarterly, 15(1951-1952), pp. 351-352.

Samuel Johnson, Dictionary of the English Language, "uncertain".

poem. With regard to the first of Johnson's criticisms, Tillyard has written that Dr. Johnson's criticism of Lycidas provides a "classic example of criticism that errs through a false assumption." Johnson's false assumption was his mistaking the intent of the poem. Johnson considered the poem an elegy; an elegy by definition professed to lament the death of a beloved person; and Lycidas did not fulfill these professions, since a major portion of the poem dealt with concerns of the author and his art, not with the death of the person about whom the poem was ostensibly written. Johnson's assumption was that Lycidas was "direct" poetry, poetry in which the author discoursed solely on the stated subject of the poem. In making this assumption, Johnson did not comprehend that the intended effect of the poem might have been quite different.¹

Lycidas is not direct poetry. Ostensibly, the poem was written as an elegy for Edward King, but it gives less attention to King's death than to discussion of personal and moral truths which have to do with the author. As Greg has pointed out, there is neither anything keen in Milton's grief, nor anything spontaneous about his lament.² Thus any reader, to comprehend the poem, must accept the handling of subject-matter which Tillyard has called "oblique", in which the author places primary emphasis on the implications of what he says rather than on the immediate emotional effect of his treatment of the subject on the reader.³

¹Eustace Tillyard, Poetry Direct and Oblique, p. 16.

²Walter Greg, Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama, p. 135.

³Tillyard, loc. cit.

In fact, the obliqueness of statement of Lycidas is one of the features of the poem which places it squarely in the mainstream of the Renaissance pastoral elegy. Johnson's judgment of the poem (and of the idea of using a pastoral for elegiac purposes) was that it was "easy and vulgar"--i.e., that the pastoral convention was too pretty and artificial to be used as a vehicle for a serious elegy.¹ He condemned the use of a pastoral setting for an elegy in his periodical The Rambler, number XXXVII, and singled out Lycidas as a particular offender.² Yet it is unclear whether Johnson ever knew that Theocritus, the originator of the pastoral, himself wrote pastoral elegies.

In his poetry, Theocritus moved away from concern for the charm of the bucolic machinery toward penetrating the essence of the characters in dramatic situations, including laments for those who were dead. Bion, a successor, took the Theocritean pastoral convention and used it to write a lament for a real person, disguising himself in the role of a shepherd singing it. When Virgil revived the pastoral in Roman poetry, he further de-emphasized the importance of the bucolic machinery and used the pastoral as a form to garment all figures as far as subject-matter was concerned, placing great emphasis on the form and regularity of the verse.³

Milton was clearly conscious of the Theocritean-Virgilian

¹Johnson, Works, Volume 8, pp. 83-92.

²James Ferguson, ed., The British Essayists, Volume 19, pp. 208-209.

³Hanford, P.M.L.A., pp. 404-412; pp. 413-419.

A. S. F. Gow, The Greek Bucolic Poets, p. xvii; pp. xix-xx.

pastoral tradition when he wrote Lycidas, and his poem has been called the last written in the English language in the Theocritean pastoral tradition.¹ In the text of the poem, Milton refers to Theocritus twice, first as the "Sicilian Muse" and later in identifying his poem as a "Dorick Lay." The tone of high seriousness and the wording of some of the lines have been shown to be borrowed directly from both Theocritus and Virgil.²

Important influences on the poem may also be traced from certain Italian Renaissance ecloguists. Petrarch wrote a number of pastorals. In them, he made an important innovation in developing an allegorical treatment of subject-matter. Many of his pastorals were vehicles for political, religious, and moral ideas. Furthermore, in at least one of his pastorals, Petrarch inserted an elaborate allegorical satire on corruption in the Church.³ Another Italian ecloguist, Giovanni Battista, the Mantuan, experimented with didactic pastorals which expressed the personal aspirations of the author--an innovation in which the author left all dissimulation of his own character aside and spoke frankly to the reader. Battista's work was known by a number of English poets, among them Barclay and Spenser, and probably by Milton. Milton was certainly familiar with another important collection of Italian Renaissance eclogue, Sannazzaro's Piscatory Eclogues. The first of these eclogues shows certain striking

¹T. P. Harrison, The Pastoral Elegy, p. 289.

²Hanford, op. cit., pp. 420-424.

T. P. Harrison, loc. cit.

³VI St. Peter.

similarities with Lycidas: certain spirits are bidden to "look homeward," both mention a "genius of the shore," and both mention Panope, whom Hanford calls a "not very familiar nymph."¹ Hanford goes on to point out that these similarities are too striking to have been the result of accident. However, Prince has shown that there were other, more important relationships between Sannazzaro's eclogues and Lycidas.

Prince placed Sannazzaro's eclogues, Tasso's Aminta, and Guarini's Il Pastore Fido together in discussing the ways in which Italian poets liberated lyric verse from strict stanzaic form. The liberation was manifested in these three authors' works by irregular, improvised rhyme schemes, a lengthening of sentences within the rhyme patterns, and a juxtaposition of six-syllable lines among the predominant eleven-syllable ones.²

Before beginning a comparison of Milton's verse techniques in Lycidas with the above, it might be well to recall Ransom's remarks on Lycidas cited earlier in this study. One might infer immediately that because Lycidas and Italian Renaissance eclogues with which Milton was probably familiar share certain characteristics, they are related. As far as freedom of stanza-form goes, the stanzas of Spenser's Epithalamion, with lengths of seventeen, eighteen, and nineteen lines, might well be compared with those of Lycidas. There is good evidence that Milton knew his Spenser, and Dryden is supposed to have remarked that Milton had told him

¹Hanford, op. cit., pp. 431-434.

²W. P. Ker, Form and Style in Poetry, quoted in Prince, op. cit., p. 72.

Spenser had generally been his model in verse technique.¹ But again, the influence of Spenser and the Italians on this poem need not have been mutually exclusive, and there is one technique which Milton uses in this poem which indicates specifically Italian influences were at work. An examination of the use of this technique may also help explain why Dr. Johnson objected to Milton's rhyming and diction.

Milton tried to make rhyme a binding agent to tie sentences of unequal emphasis and lengths together. Prince has called this his rhetoric of rhyme, and has traced its origins back into Milton's fondness for canzone forms. Canzoni tended to be constructed by Italian poets in two parts, like sonnets. Milton apparently used the canzone as the basis for the stanza form of Lycidas, but he overrode the usual division of each stanza and played the ideas in each section off against each other. He made the contrasts even more dramatic by varying the length of sentences and occasionally inserting a six-syllable line. In addition, each of the stanzas was organized around a key-line--one which rhymed with its predecessor but which initiated a new thought within the stanza. An example of a key-line is found in the following (lines 132-137):

Return Alpheus, thy dread voice is past,
That shrunk thy streams; Return Sicilian Muse,
And call the Vales, and bid them hither cast
Their Bels, and Flourets of a thousand hues.
Ye valleys low where the middle whispers use,
of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,...²

¹Walter Scott, ed., The Works of John Dryden, Volume 11, p. 267.

²Columbia Milton, Volume 1, Part One, p. 81.

In the first line, the new stanza begins with a new rhyme. The second rhyme is not only used in the fourth line, but in the fifth as well, forming a couplet. Yet the fifth line introduces a new subject of discourse in the stanza, so that the line looks both forward and backward: it completes in sound the rhyme of the preceding one, and begins, in logic, a succession of new lines. This fusion of the two parts of the stanza in technique parallels the fusion of the "direct" and "oblique" aspects of subject-matter also. In the case cited, Alpheus represents the allusion to the oblique aspects, and the Sicilian Muse an allusion to the direct.

Milton here seems to have used a modification of the stanza divisa and chiave of Dante and Petrarch.¹ Its use not only helped fuse the two aspects of subject-matter, but helped give the verse a quality of sustained improvisation. The improvisational quality was further extended in the meter by the introduction of occasional six-syllable lines, and in the rhyme, by the introduction of ten lines scattered throughout the poem which do not rhyme at all. These calculated irregularities suggest the "disciplined improvisation" of the early poems. While they stemmed ultimately from the verse techniques of Italian poets, the particular use to which Milton put them in Lycidas was so original that it is more accurate to say that Italian influences on the poem exist as echoes rather than as borrowings.²

¹i.e., divided or two-part stanza and key-line.

²Prince, op. cit., pp. 84-88.

Adams, op. cit., pp. 160-161.

Hanford, A Milton Handbook, p. 167.

How different are Milton's verse techniques from those of Alexander Pope in the latter's Second Pastoral (Summer), in which Dr. Johnson could find little that was irregular:

A Shepherd's boy (he seeks no better name)
Led forth his flocks along the silver Thame,
Where dancing sunbeams on the waters played, 1
And verdant alders formed a quivering shade...

Here there are no troublesome key-line couplets, no insertions of six-syllable lines, no variation from the couplet pattern. However, it is not a memorable poem either. When the superficial irregularities of Milton's poem are seen as techniques for binding together the complex, dualistic aspects of subject-matter, they seem fully as justified as Pope's mellifluous regularities in achieving their effect. As Saintsbury observed, Dr. Johnson's critical attitude seemed to be that regular verse with even more regular rhymes was the only end worth aiming at in verse, but Johnson disregarded the question as to what purpose diction, numbers, and rhyme serve if they are only to lull us.²

A gross fault of Lycidas, according to Dr. Johnson, was its inherent improbability, as has been mentioned. He particularly objected to Milton's introduction of an attack against the Church in the middle of the poem, and to Milton's identification of the shepherd Lycidas with the professional clergy. "Such equivocations," he wrote, "are always unskillful," and Milton's use of them approached impiety. Johnson did allow that the latter might

¹Louis I. Bredvold, and others, eds., Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, p. 344.

²Saintsbury, A History of English Prosody, Volume 2, p. 218.

have been an impression which Milton gave unintentionally, but that he did not like Milton's Puritan zeal is evident. Milton, though, was in good company, since it has already been pointed out that Petrarch had introduced an elaborate satire on the Church in one of his pastorals. However, by the inherent improbability of Lycidas, Johnson also meant that the bucolic imagery sounded as though it had come out of a college textbook. In this sense, Johnson was right, but he misunderstood the purpose of the bucolic machinery. Like Virgil's, it was there partly as conventional trapping. Primarily, however, it served as the setting in which something more important happened: where the relationships were drawn between Milton's life and art and the dead shepherd. It was in the vitality of the relationship between the death of Lycidas and its universal implications that the poem's strength lay.

Although Dr. Johnson did not mention it, one additional aspect of Lycidas has presented problems to students of Milton. This is the question of the number of divisions of the poem and what the function of each division is in relation to the others. There are four noteworthy views, those of Prince, Saintsbury, Tillyard, and Finney.

Prince has described the poem in the most mechanically accurate way as being composed of eleven verse-paragraphs (marked by indented lines) which are closely but irregularly rhymed (except for ten lines which do not rhyme at all), with certain six-syllable lines mixed in among the predominant ten-syllable ones, but always

rhyming with the preceding ten-syllable line. The last verse-paragraph is unlike the others in that it is rhymed like an ottava rima (abababcc).¹

Saintsbury has indicated that while the poem may be divided into eleven verse-paragraphs, the irregularity of the rhyming made it evident that Milton wrote Lycidas originally as blank verse and then equipped it with rhymes so as to make it a lyric vehicle. This explanation is difficult at best to prove, since it rests on proof essentially outside the text; furthermore, it does not account for the occasional short lines which appear in the poem. Oras has agreed in many details with both Prince and Saintsbury, but has insisted that it was the form of a madrigal which Milton worked with to establish the stanza form which he used in Lycidas.²

Another approach to the structure of the poem was taken by E. M. W. Tillyard. Instead of dividing the poem into eleven sections on the basis of typography, Tillyard described it as consisting of five sections held together by themes, without attempting to account for the form of the individual sections. Each of the five sections accomplishes some sort of parallel movement. The first (lines 1-24) describes the death of Lycidas and the possible death of the author. The second section (lines 25-84) laments Lycidas' death as well as the possibility of the author's own. The third section (lines 85-131) provides a comment on Lycidas' body, contains a denunciation of the clergy, and sets

¹Saintsbury, op. cit., Volume 2, p. 222.

²Oras, "Milton's Early Rhyme Schemes and the Structure of Lycidas," M.P., 52(August, 1954), pp. 12-22.

forth the poet's grievances against the clergy. The fourth section (lines 132-164) describes the retributive power of the "two-handed engine" and is followed by a contrasting flower-passage. The fifth section (line 165 to the end) contrasts the renunciation necessary to obtain immortality with the rewards of having obtained it. The two elements of parallel movement in each of the sections correspond roughly to the "direct" aspect of the poem, i.e., the details of the death of King, and the "oblique" aspect, which is predominant, in which Milton discourses on his own life and art.¹

This parallelism of the movement of ideas in the poem is accompanied by a parallelism in the diction like that which has already been described as a technique in the early poems and sonnets. In the lines cited previously in this section to demonstrate Milton's rhetoric of rhyme, we also find notable examples of parallelism:

Return Alpheus, thy dread voice is past,
That shrunk thy streams; Return Sicilian Muse,
And call the Vales, and bid them hither cast
Their Bels, and Flourets of a thousand hues.
Ye valleys low where the middle whispers use,
Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks...²

It may have been the repetitiousness of the parallelistic technique to which Dr. Johnson objected when he criticized the diction of Lycidas as being "harsh" and observed that the combinations of words used in the poem, while new, were unpleasant and labored.³

Another point-of-view toward the divisions of the poem was proposed by Professor Gretchen Finney. Miss Finney felt that

¹Tillyard, Milton, pp. 81-85.

²Columbia Milton, loc. cit.

³Johnson, op. cit., p. 84.

Milton had used a musical structure not unlike that of an oratorio for Lycidas, and found evidence for this in Milton's reference to the poem as a "Dorick Lay," since the Doric mode is a tonal system, and as a "monody," since at that time the word was used to denote a kind of music sung by a solo voice in recitative style. Giovanni Battista Doni, whom Milton had met in Italy, was the author of a book which contained a discussion of monody in which he defended it as a more expressive and effective musical style than polyphony, and as being more dramatic and nearer natural speech than singing.¹ Since of all the early poems, Lycidas is the only one which can be dated with some certainty after Milton's Italian journey, these considerations could well have borne upon its composition; however, it would be well to bear in mind the connotations of "Dorick" which had to do with Theocritean pastoral convention.² Miss Finney described the construction of the poem as follows: the first 84 lines constitute the first section, in which the first 24 lines are a recitative, followed by a chorus, recitative, and dialogue between the shepherd-poet and Phoebus. The second division of the poem begins at line 85 and continues to line 131, and consists of a series of recitative passages. The third section begins at line 132 and ends at line 165, is of slower tempo, and prepares the reader for the finale with a series of short choruses. The final section of the poem is a triumphant

¹Finney, *op. cit.*, pp. 342-350. See also:

Paul Lang, Music in Western Civilization, p. 333.

²See page 49.

choral piece with an ending of great serenity.¹

This last point of view toward Lycidas is certainly suggestive and ties together a large amount of biographical information about the relation of music to poetry in Milton's life which had not been related before. However, apart from certain sections which seem to evidence changing musical qualities, there is little in the text of the poem or in historical sources which would prove that Milton's concept of form was essentially musical when he wrote Lycidas. Tillyard's point of view toward the use of parallel constructions in the poem is more easily demonstrated in the text, and although Tillyard was unaware of it when he wrote, that very parallelism was a technique which Milton had used in almost all the early poetry which appears now to show influence of Italian models of rhyme, meter, and diction. The most complete and believable account of Lycidas is Prince's, which, in describing the logical structure behind the stanzas, helps explain the relation between the direct and oblique aspects of the poem.

¹Finney, op. cit., pp. 329-337.

CONCLUSIONS

We must again, after a somewhat circumambient course, come back to the original question of this study: namely, what were the Italian influences on John Milton's early poetry? Our discussion of the question has involved two sets of variables: first, the analyses of facts concerning Milton's life and times which would indicate Italian influences; and second, analyses of certain of the early poems in which, on the basis of internal evidence, Italian influences seem to have been exerted.

To a certain extent, the dual nature of the method which has been applied in this study must remain a constant thorn in the side of a student of Milton. Historical information is suggestive, but is not of value until it can be tied to something in the texts of the poems. Likewise, an analysis of a poem may be provocative, but is of little value until the observations are fixed on some evidence which would establish the historicity of Italian influences on Milton's work. Nevertheless, there are links between the historical and textual bases of Italian influences on Milton's early poetry.

Some of the early poems seem to echo Italian models. Lines written by Petrarch are remarkably similar to some of those in Milton's sonnets in Italian. Milton's stance as a young lover in the Italian poems is Petrarchan. In the Nativity Ode, there are echoes of the pagan gods of Tasso's Rime Sacre, and there are exact parallels between the form of Upon the Circumcision and Tasso's Alla Beatissima Vergine in Loreto. There are similarities

between allusions in Lycidas and those made in Sannazzaro's First Piscatory Eclogue.

More important than these direct echoes in Milton's poems were the stylistic devices he used which seem clearly to have their origins in Italian poetry. They were first demonstrated in his poems in Italian: the complex organization of clauses within sentences, the use of parallelism in syntax, and the pleonastic tendency. In At a Solemn Musick, he experimented with complex sentences, run-on lines, and larger rhetorical units in much the same way as had della Casa and Tasso. Of the sonnets, Sonnet IX in particular shows a use of parallelistic phrasing, a lengthening of phrases, suspension of the sense, and collisions of open vowels, all of which conform to the Italian idea of asprezza in verse-technique. These, combined with a slightly irregular use of a canzone-stanza and a novel use of rhyme as a binding agent, gave evidence of Italian influences on Lycidas.

Milton is a poet whose verse impresses a reader as being deliberate and controlled. That he was deliberate in his use of poetic techniques is clear, and the techniques he chose to use filled his verse full of complexities, contrasts, and sudden interplay of the "expected and unexpected." Although della Casa and Tasso had done much in the way of experimentation with these verse techniques, Milton did not merely copy their efforts: rather, he used the techniques in ways which finally were unique to himself. A study of Italian influences on him does, however, place in a frame of reference the interplay between the expected and the unexpected which he sought to achieve. In achieving it,

he used a syntax which made his style complex but his rhetoric sonorous, and gave his verse a kind of controlled fervor even though it was frequently set in a verse-structure that bore all the marks of sustained improvisation. Of course, the syntax, rhyme, meter, stanzaic forms, diction, rhetorical style, and subject matter are not the poems: the poems stand as they are, finished products. But those considerations do bear on the success of the poems and stand, like Milton's angels, "in order serviceable."

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ITALIAN INFLUENCES ON JOHN MILTON'S
EARLY POETRY

by

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Among the influences which played a part in shaping John Milton's poetic techniques in his early years, Italian influences were important. They may be traced in part to his humanistic education, origins of which are found in the Italian Renaissance. However, the identification Milton may have felt with the spirit and literary pursuits of Renaissance humanism is dealt with in this study only as it is apposite to a discussion of the influences of specific Italian poets on the subject-matter, rhetorical style, diction, stanzaic forms, and meter of the poems in the 1645 edition of Poems of Mr. John Milton.

There are two extremes to the methods which have been applied to the study of Italian influences on Milton: one is the "scientific," the collection of historical evidence; and the other is the "intuitive," the analysis of text and the deduction of influences from that analysis. The method of this study is somewhere between these two extremes. An attempt is made to relate historical evidence with those features of the poetry which under textual analysis indicate Italian influences.

Milton states that he studied Italian from his early years with the encouragement of his father who greatly admired Italian music. His Italian studies continued while he was at St. Paul's School and Cambridge. In 1629, while at Cambridge, he bought a copy of the works of Giovanni della Casa into which had been bound copies of Dante's Convivio and the poems of Benedetto Varchi. This volume is the only collection of Italian poetry which is known to have been in Milton's library, although there were records of another volume no longer extant, La Tina Equivoci, by

Antonio Malatesti. In his tractates and familiar letters, as well as in his Commonplace Book, Milton indicates his familiarity with the works of Dante, Petrarch, Tasso, and Boiardo. From an historical survey of Italian works popular in Milton's time, it may reasonably be inferred that he was familiar with Sannazzaro's Piscatory Eclogues, Marino's The Suspicion of Herod, and Alberti's Descrizione di Tutta l'Italia.

In 1638 and 1639, Milton travelled in Italy, visiting Florence, Rome, and Naples. He demonstrated a command of the Italian language in his appearance before the Florentine academies such as the Accademia degli Apatisti and the Accademia degli Svogliati, and in his relations with such distinguished literary figures as Cardinal Barberini, Benedetto Buonmattei, and Manso. Milton praised these men in his Epitaphium Damonis, and printed tributes from them in the 1645 edition of his poems.

From available historical evidence, the following facts seem most important in regard to Milton's background in Italian literature:

- 1) that he learned Italian as a youth, under private tutorship;
- 2) that works by della Casa, Dante, and Varchi are known to have been a part of his personal library by the time he was at Cambridge;
- 3) that encomiums written by Italians whom he had met during his Italian journey were printed in the 1645 edition;
- 4) that most commentators now date the composition of his poems in Italian in 1629, while he was at Cambridge.

The last point brings us to Milton's verse. We may find direct echoes of Italian poems in Milton's early poetry. In the sonnets in Italian, some of Milton's lines are almost identical with some of Petrarch's in his Canzoniere. Milton's stance as a young lover in the Italian poems is Petrarchan. The sentence construction of Sonnet VI is similar to that of della Casa's sonnet to Nicolo Phrisio. Of the early minor poems, the Nativity Ode contains some direct echoes of the pagan gods enumerated in Tasso's Rime Sacre, and there are exact parallels between the form of Upon the Circumcision and Tasso's Alla Beatissima Vergine in Loreto. Some of the allusions made in Lycidas are like certain ones in Sannazzaro's First Piscatory Eclogue.

More important than direct echoes are certain stylistic devices that clearly had their origins in Italian poetry and influenced him directly, through Petrarch, Tasso, and della Casa, and indirectly, through Spenser. These devices were first demonstrated in the sonnets and canzone in Italian: the complex organization of clauses within sentences, the use of parallelism in syntax, and the pleonastic tendency. In At a Solemn Musick, Milton experimented with complex sentences, run-on lines, and larger rhetorical units in much the same way as had della Casa and Tasso. Of the sonnets in English, Sonnet IX in particular shows a use of parallelistic phrasing, a lengthening of phrases, suspension of the sense, and collisions of open vowels--all of which conform to the Italian idea of asprezza or "roughness" in verse-technique. These, combined with a slightly irregular use of a canzone-stanza

and a novel use of rhyme, gave evidence of Italian influences on Lycidas, although there may, in addition, have been a background in seventeenth century musical drama for the structure of the poem.

Milton's verse strikes the reader as being complex, deliberate and controlled. That he intended what he wrote, in all of its complexity, is obvious. Upon the bases of both the historical and the stylistic evidence, it appears logical to conclude that Milton adopted certain verse techniques of Italian poets to make his verse more complex and its content more dramatic. Milton did not merely copy, but rather turned the poetic devices of the Italians to his own use. The end product, his poetry, is sonorous, serious, yet set in a verse-structure which frequently has all the marks of sustained improvisation. The poetic techniques which Milton used are not the poems: the poems stand as they are, finished products. But those considerations do bear upon the success of the poems and stand, like Milton's angels, "in order serviceable."